



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO
REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

DATE ISSUED: May 11, 2011 REPORT NO:
ATTENTION: Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee
SUBJECT: Wildland Firefighting Preparedness

REFERENCE:

REQUESTED ACTION

This is an informational item only. No action is required by the Committee or the City Council.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Accept the Report.

SUMMARY

Preparation for wildland fires in San Diego is an ongoing process. As our region's history has shown, we are at risk for these types of fires throughout the year. As temperatures rise and fuel moistures decline, our risk factors increase. The greatest risk for these fires to grow out of control exists during strong Santa Ana wind events which most commonly occur from September through March.

As part of our daily operational preparedness, we calculate the wildland burn index for the Coastal and Inland zones of the City. This information is provided to our crews and staff each morning to ensure their awareness of wildland fire growth potential. Based on 14 years of data, these indexes use fire weather components to predict the probability of extreme fire behavior. At the direction of the Fire Chief, additional staffing can be authorized for index readings that predict the potential for extreme fire behavior.

Ongoing training throughout the year ensures readiness for fire season. All operations personnel were assigned to complete Company (crew) level wildland firefighting refresher training during the month of April and will be completing wildland Battalion level training and evaluations during the month of May.

In addition, during the past year 45 personnel have received specialized training related to wildland firefighting including courses such as; Fire Operations in the Wildland /Urban Interface, Task Force/ Strike Team Leader and Wildfire Safety Officer. As well, in the past year

121 personnel have received training related to fire leadership and fire command of incidents. There will be additional training presented to 45 personnel for Command and Firing Operations (offensive/defensive use of fire) during May and June 2011.

San Diego Fire-Rescue participates in several cooperative aid agreements to provide and receive assistance in the case of large emergency incidents. These agreements can provide rapid assistance from Local, State, Federal and Military sources when necessary. During the month of May there will be three days of county-wide wildland firefighting drills. Fire resources representing most of the fire agencies in San Diego County will be participating. These annual drills give us the opportunity to strengthen relationships with our fire service partners.

Based upon lessons learned following the 2003 and 2007 wildfires, we have strengthened our military partnerships through local contacts with military commanders and the Defense Support to Civil Authorities (DSCA) program. Agreements with local commanders and the DSCA process provide a means by which military assets and personnel can be used to assist in missions normally carried out by civil authorities, including firefighting. DSCA training has been conducted for key Fire-Rescue, EOC and OHS staff. The OHS Supervising Preparedness Officer will attend a DSCA-focused conference hosted by Northern Command (a joint U.S. military organization) on May 9th, 10th and 11th, 2011.

We have enhanced our ground based firefighting capabilities through equipment acquisition and the addition of surge capacity. We have replaced 29 of our Type 1 engines in the past four fiscal years. Our fleet modernization has provided us with 32 Type 1 reserve engines that can be staffed with off-duty firefighters for an increased surge capacity. Additional firefighters can be deployed in an alternative model using our 12 Fire Attack Support Team (FAST) kits and we currently have 3 utility vehicles equipped with the Air-Kwik firefighting systems with plans to add 6 more Air-Kwik equipped vehicles. Our two 33-year-old water tenders have been replaced with 2 new state of the art 3000 gallon water tenders that feature firefighting capabilities including a front mounted turret, side spray nozzles and 500 gpm pumping capability.

Fixed and rotary wing aerial firefighting capability is critical to our success in controlling wildland fires. Helicopters are a proven resource in fighting wildland fires because they can get to a location quickly and keep the fire in check while ground crews are responding. There are currently 4 firefighting helicopters dedicated to this region--the two San Diego Fire-Rescue helicopters and two operated by the Sheriff's Department. Both Fire-Rescue helicopters provide fire suppression, rescue and air medical transportation as part of their "multi-mission" service. These services are also provided at night through a cutting-edge Night Vision Goggle (NVG) program. Fire-Rescue's second helicopter will be staffed beginning July 1st 2011, based on the Mayor's proposed budget. This will be during the time of year when the wildland fire threat is the greatest. Having both City helicopters available will increase our aerial fire firefighting capability.

Fire-Rescue and SDG&E are also currently working on a new MOU for utilization of the SDG&E's helitanker (HT729) for this fire season. Our air operations program will serve as the manager of this important air asset which is capable of delivering 2600 gallons of water per drop. To take advantage of the military air assets in the region we also have three qualified Military

Helicopter Managers which will allow us to safely make use of military helicopters when appropriate.

Fire prevention efforts are also a key component of our wildfire preparedness. Following the 2007 Witch-Guejito Fire, the Fire-Rescue Department added 5 Code Compliance Officers (CCO) to its proactive brush management inspection program for a total 7-CCO's of the 14 positions necessary to accomplish annual brush inspections on all parcels. With current staffing we accomplish these inspections on a biannual basis.

In the last year, using GIS and an inspection database tracking and mapping system, Fire-Rescue has proactively conducted brush inspections. There are 42,818 privately owned parcels and 1,693 City owned parcels within the City's Wildland Urban Interface. In the last year, the Park and Recreation Open Space Division has used City and grant funds to conduct brush management operations on half of the City open space acreage within their Zone-2 brush management responsibility.

Wildfire resistive construction is also an important element in protecting structures and on July 28, 2009, City Council voted to approve ordinance 0-19984, adopting the final version of the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones. This requires all new buildings or additions that are located in these very high fire hazard severity zones to comply with Chapter 7-A of the 2007 California Building Code which contains provisions to reduce structure ignitability by wildfires.

The continuation and growth of the CERT program is another factor that continues to benefit public safety. To date 1,400 citizens have been trained and there are 15 teams that include every council district. The largest activation of CERT teams came with the Witch-Guejito Fires of 2007. Calls went out Sunday night, and the first volunteers reported in at midnight. Over the next three days 107 volunteers put in hundreds of hours. They not only provided assistance to fire victims, but they also performed some support tasks normally conducted by firefighters. As a result we had additional trained fire crews on the fire lines.

In summary, while the threat of wildfire is ever-present in our community, it is believed that all prudent measures to prepare for combating wildfires have been taken. These measures are listed below:

- Proactive Brush Management inspections and brush thinning have been conducted on both private and public parcels throughout our City,
- Building codes for structures in areas designated as Very High Fire Hazard Severity have been strengthened.
- Firefighters have received refresher and advanced training in wildfire operations, incident command and leadership.
- Additional firefighting equipment in the form of, 29 new Type 1 fire engines, 3 Air-Kwik Systems, and 12 Fire Attack Support Team (FAST) Kits have been procured. 32 type 1 engines are now maintained as reserves to provide a surge capacity in the event of a large wildfire and two water tenders have been replaced with new apparatus with more advanced capability
- The 2nd City firefighting helicopter will be re-staffed from July-December.

- SDG&E has again made its Helitanker available for regional use. This resource will be managed by SDFD under an MOU with SDG&E
- Cooperative aid agreements with local, state, federal and military agencies have been renewed and relationships to ensure rapid deployment of resources have been exercised and strengthened.
- A large cadre of trained CERT members stand ready to mobilize and assist during a wildfire event.

FISCAL CONSIDERATIONS

PREVIOUS COUNCIL and/or COMMITTEE ACTIONS

N/A

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND PUBLIC OUTREACH EFFORTS

Ongoing

KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND PROJECTED IMPACTS

Community and Citizens



Javier Mainar, Fire Chief